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CONSERVATISM IN RELIGION

E. ALBERT COOK

CONGREGATIONAL COLLEGE OF CANADA, MONTREAL

Human progress depends on the discovery of the forces which are active in the universe and of the way to use them so as to accomplish desired ends. Power is in itself non-moral, and may be used for either moral or immoral purposes. All experience proves that conservatism is an immense power in human nature, and in religion probably more than in any other sphere of human life. It seems strange, then, that more attention has not been given to the nature and source of this power, and to the methods by which it may be so employed as to help and build up rather than obstruct and destroy the spiritual life of men.

The power of conservatism affects doctrine, ethics, ceremonial and liturgical forms, and polity in unequal degrees, although it affects them all very greatly. This essay, however, is concerned only with conservatism in doctrine, and leaves the other fields to other students.

By conservatism in this sphere we understand the clinging to old forms as opposed to new. In saying that conservatism is a non-moral power, we mean that we cannot regard the old view as true or right because it is old, nor the new as right or wrong because it is new. Those who stand for the old because it is old would always, consciously or unconsciously, have a reason for their higher valuation of the old other than its mere age, and we propose to consider various reasons which can be given for a preference for the old. It should be understood that what we are here concerned with is not the age of a doctrine as known in the history of thought, but its familiarity or novelty to a certain circle of hearers or to a given generation of mankind. It is, for instance, at least conceivable that certain so-called modern views of theologians were held by Jesus, or even by some of the Old Testament prophets; but if they are new to a given person or congregation or generation, the power of conservatism will in-

evitably oppose them so long as they are novel, although it may support and apply them when they have become familiar, and thus acquired for the individual or generation the prescription which attaches to the old.

We may roughly divide our investigation of the nature of conservatism into two parts: *first*, the elements in older views and their relations which secure their support; and, *second*, the elements in new views and their relations which repel, and tend to cause their rejection.

I. THE MAINTENANCE OF THE OLD FOR ITS OWN SAKE

From the natural inertia of human thought in society, the number of those adhering to the older views will always be much greater than the number of those accepting the new. The children of any generation receive religious truth from the mature people of their time—their parents, teachers, and preachers—ready-made. These doctrines, in the forms in which they are presented, are, of course, in normal conditions, held to be true by the adults who transmit them to the children; and this in consequence of the experience which these adults have had of the world, or in spite of it. They are, therefore, correlated with the facts of experience and harmonious with them; and, having been psychologically possible in the parents, they will be psychologically possible in the children in the measure in which the experience of the children resembles that of the parents.

What they are taught will at first be accepted by the children as true, on the authority of their teachers, and the doctrines thus instilled will be woven into the children's whole view of life, and remain there, unless withdrawn or destroyed by some later experience. A system of doctrine developed through ages of study and experience will be sure to have so much in it to commend it to those to whom it is presented, and professional religious teachers will have at their command such well-tried arguments in support of it, that only the most active and powerful minds will go beyond or aside from what they have been taught. The teachers of new views of religious truth in any generation will therefore necessarily be few, and the proportion of people who

adhere to a so-called new view will depend chiefly on the length of time that the new view has been actively disseminated. It may be that two men in different parts of the world independently discover or invent the telephone, or phonograph, or wireless telegraph; but even then it is rarely more than two of the millions of the race who make the same discovery at the same time, and their contemporaneous action is to be explained by the action upon them of common forces. So a new view in religion or philosophy begins with a very few, and spreads only slowly and gradually to the multitude.

This is not *a priori* theory but well-recognized fact. It is a common observation that most preachers, although their profession requires them to be thinking theologically, remain in substantially the doctrinal position which they reached in their theological schools and the earliest years of their ministry. How much more will the members of their churches, most of whose time is occupied with thinking about other things than religion or theology, retain with little change the forms of doctrine received in early youth! In any generation, then, in which newer and older ideas of religious truth compete, the vast majority of people who have any definite religious views at all will adhere to the older forms, unless influenced by some very unusual and powerful movement, like the Reformation in Germany.

From the natural inertia of thought in the individual, most men are prone to cling to the old and familiar rather than accept the new. This principle is to be distinguished from the one previously considered. There we were concerned with the probability of the presentation of newer forms of doctrine to the people of a generation; and we saw that in a given generation the newer ideas are likely to be presented for consideration to only a few. Here we have to do with the acceptance of opinions when they are presented. Of all those to whom the newer views are presented after the older ones have once been accepted, it is likely that but a small proportion will change their views. If all minds were constantly and actively logical, of course, there could be no such rule as this. The most reasonable form of doctrine would be accepted and adhered to, whether it were old or new. But very few minds are thus rationally active, except in those spheres of life which occupy

their time and energy most directly; and even within those spheres the men who, by logical thinking, improve on the ideas and methods transmitted to them by others are the exceptions. The familiar psychological laws of mental habit explain the tendency of early ideas to become permanent in a given mind. The further fact that where definite and extended religious instruction has been received, it becomes interwoven with all the principles, ideals, and aspects of life, and the more completely, the more seriously the religious views are held and applied to conduct, must make it apparent that any considerable change of religious conceptions would mean for the most earnest religious persons a mental revolution, a recasting of the whole outlook upon life, and thus be a difficult process, the tendency to resist which would be very strong.

As religious views concern and affect the emotional ties which bind men to persons, human and divine, the whole strength of these emotions opposes any change which may seem to imperil the position or relations of the objects of these emotions. The first class of such emotional ties is that uniting the individual with his friends, kinsmen, and forefathers. To discard a belief which has been earnestly held and defended by some hero or saint whom I honor, some parent or grandparent whom I love and reverence, some friend with whom I have the most intimate and affectionate relations, seems to be a reflection on his judgment and mental powers, if not his character; to be exalting myself and my own mind as superior to his; or even to be—what it often really and tragically is—the erection of a barrier between my friend and myself. The more noble the nature, the more it revolts from such apparent disloyalty, and the stronger the motive to distrust the newer view, even though it may seem to the reason the more probable one.

This kind of conservatism is illustrated in the story of the African chief who was about to submit to Christian baptism at the hands of a missionary. Before doing so, he asked the missionary what had become of his ancestors—whether he should meet them in heaven. When the missionary replied that this was impossible, they were all hopelessly lost in hell, the chief decided to share their fate rather than separate himself from them by

accepting Christianity; and we say that it was the nobler strain in his character which moved him to that decision. Again, apart from the dogma of the superhuman (i.e. essentially non-human) origin of the Scriptures, our reverence for the Prophets and Apostles, as well as for the later Fathers, might lead us to say that their views of God and Christ and salvation must have been right, and that it is very presumptuous for us to set up our views against theirs. This feeling is sometimes manifested in ludicrous ways, as in the case of the woman who, when the minister began to read from the Revised Version of the Bible, indignantly left the church, saying that if the King James Version was good enough for Saint Paul it was good enough for her. The nature of the conservatism was the same as in the other instances, although it was not so logical.

The second class of such emotional ties is that existing between a man and the objects of his specifically religious thought. For example, most Christians have been taught to think of Jesus as being God, and therefore as having at all times had the attributes of God, omniscience, omnipotence, and the rest. No matter how contrary this position is to the teaching of the Bible and to the necessities of thought, any attempt to convince them that Jesus was even for a time limited, and without the full powers of God, seems like degrading him—a lowering of the estimate in which they have held him, a derogation of the honor due him, an impeachment of his character; and in proportion as they realize that they have been saved from sin and death through him, and thus feel bound to him by the strongest bonds of love, gratitude, adoration, and reverence, they resist any teaching which seems to lower his position or diminish the glory which belongs to him.

Older views of religious doctrine are generally conceived as having been revealed or accredited by superhuman agencies, divine or angelic, and having therefore the authority of God behind them; the newer views are consequently regarded as opposing God, contradicting his Word, denying his veracity, having their origin, at the best, in fallible human reason or vain imagination, but not infrequently ascribed to the inspiration of devils, or at least to malignancy and a wilful resistance of God and goodness. Hence the newer forms of doctrine are abhorred and feared by

the pious, and looked upon as traps and snares, the more dangerous as they are the more reasonable and thus more likely to seduce the unwary. This feeling and attitude exist in all degrees, from the sorrowful disapproval of one who is thought to be mistakenly teaching what is different from God-revealed truth to fanatical persecution, torture, and crucifixion or burning at the stake of the man who dares to "blaspheme God" by teachings contrary to the popular religion. It is almost a universal phenomenon, and by no means confined to Christendom. Several of the philosophers of ancient Greece were accused of impiety and in danger of death, because they combated some popular religious ideas. This was one of the charges on which Socrates was put to death, and Aristotle was compelled by a similar charge to flee from Athens. In Hinduism and Mohammedanism religious doctrine is regarded as having been revealed by God rather than consciously discovered or unconsciously developed by man. Jesus was put to death for blaspheming God by teaching what was contrary to his revealed truth, and on similar grounds martyrs have suffered from the earliest to the latest times. An interesting illustration of this feeling in our own times occurs in a book of poems called *Canadian Heart Songs*, in which are the following lines:

"You teachers in the colleges supported by the church,
Who pretend to wondrous knowledge and to marvellous research,
Who are really jackals, tearing at the vitals of all truth,
Sowing seeds of dire disaster in the fertile minds of youth,
How dare you say that that is false which Jesus says is true?
And palm off long-exploded lies, and claim they're something new?
Your 'new theology,' all false, is old as sin and death;
It bites just like the Serpent's fang; it smells of Satan's breath."

As bearing on the same principle, it is worth noting that propagators of fabricated religions like Mormonism, or of erratic sects like those of Dowie and Elijah Sanford, or of strange doctrines like those of Christian Science, find most success with the multitudes when they claim that their peculiar teachings are not the result of their own invention, discovery, or study, but are divine revelations made to them, which are not subject in any respect to revision or the test of reason. Indeed, the general disrepute

in which rationalism and rationalists stand with pious people generally is a symptom of the lack of confidence in the power of human reason and the consequent demand for some other authoritative source of truth which is still very wide-spread. We are not here concerned with the theory of revelation or the question of the real source of religious truth, but are noticing the actual psychological situation in the religious world of the past and present, of which religious leaders must take account.

The peculiar place of earlier beliefs in memory and in the history of the life of the individual, even when they have been subsequently supplanted by newer beliefs, is such that, in periods of great excitement, strain, depression, weakness, sorrow, pain, and dying the older beliefs are apt to resume their original place in the mind and feelings, and cause the man to abandon the later ones. Illustrations of this fact are common enough, and seem simple enough to understand. The principle of the Roman Catholic Church, that in the first seven years of a child's life it can imprint its doctrines so firmly upon the mental nature that they will be practically ineffaceable, is a recognition of this fact. The case of a very prominent evangelist and religious teacher who, after a "modern" theological education, was "converted" and returned to the earlier forms of belief, is probably to be explained in this way.

The fact, often made much of, that conservative evangelists, preaching the "old" doctrines in the old forms, are generally far more successful in persuading large masses of people to a definite profession of the faith which they were taught in childhood, and to a change of ethical direction in their lives, than those evangelists whose doctrines are more unfamiliar, is without doubt largely due to this principle and to the one next to be explained. So also we shall understand the stories, doubtless in some cases true, of dying persons who turn away with repugnance from the words of the minister who tries to comfort and sustain them with a modern gospel which they may have accepted and approved in later years, and find satisfaction only in the old doctrines presented to them in the forms familiar in childhood and early youth. The earlier beliefs were accepted with a whole-heartedness and perfect faith which, from the nature of the case, cannot be given to the

later ones. The associations of the earlier beliefs are with the most optimistic and innocent period of life, and with those memories which are most vivid and most dear in later years. There will therefore be a glory and strength about the earlier forms of faith which only in rare instances can be equalled by later forms, however sincerely accepted; and the later will seldom be so harmoniously adjusted, or so intimately interwoven with the general views of life and its interests and affections, as the earlier. Hence the frequently preponderating power of the earlier forms.

The popular, pseudo-pragmatic test of doctrines by the character and efficiency of the lives of men who hold the older and the newer forms will probably, in a considerable majority of cases, be more favorable to those who hold the older, for two reasons:

First, the enthusiasm, confidence, and energy of a man in affirming and propagating his beliefs will be commonly in proportion to the degree of assurance with which he holds them, and this is almost necessarily greater in the case of one who holds without change the faith first presented to him than in the case of him who has become convinced that his earlier beliefs are untenable, and that other forms of faith are nearer the truth. Just as the river confined between narrow rock walls in the canyon will be deeper than one that freely meanders over the level prairie, so the man who has never admitted any doubt or question with regard to the truth of his faith will be more intense than the one who recognizes a measure of truth in doctrines which he does not accept and a measure of error in doctrines which at first he accepted unreservedly, and who admits the possibility that some elements in the faith which he still holds may be mistaken and have to be abandoned when the fuller light shall come.

While we cannot here enter into epistemological questions and problems of theological method, we may observe that all more thorough theologians are constrained to make the distinction between faith and knowledge, and to recognize the relative uncertainty of the former, and the voluntary element in it which does not belong to knowledge in the strict sense. But it is probable that the great majority of laymen, and even a considerable proportion of preachers and religious teachers, do not recognize this distinction, and that, especially in cases where

faith held has never been subjected to tests of severe doubt, it is assumed that its certainty is of the same kind as that of matters of every-day experience in the realm of sense-knowledge. In such cases, doubtless, the faith will have the element of assurance in it, which, although based on ignorance and error, will be as powerful for him who possesses it as if it were securely founded.

Again, as has been noted above, faith, when rightly distinguished from knowledge, has in it a voluntary element. That is, it requires a certain effort of will to apply the faith to life, and a greater effort as the application is more difficult and the doubt more serious. Now, in any given individual at a given time the available amount of energy is limited. If he have a given theory (article of faith) to apply to life and a particular task to accomplish, he cannot spend on the task the energy exhausted in clinging to the theory. This seems to explain, at least partially, the unusual success in social and religious work of some High Church celibates, Salvation Army officers, Jesuits, and others, who assume the doctrine transmitted to them as unquestionable and turn all their energy to the accomplishment of the practical moral task at hand. This principle is illustrated in Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in the chapter on "The Lamp of Obedience." Ruskin there maintains that, unless one particular system of architecture is universally adopted in England, there can be no real architecture at all. The principle is that if the energy of the architect is dissipated by learning various systems and weighing their relative merits for the problem at hand, he will have too little left for the solving of his problem and the true development of any given system.

Second, religious and moral revival or conversion is far simpler and easier on the basis of accepted and familiar doctrines than on that of unfamiliar ones. Attention has been called to the fact that most successful evangelists are conservative in theology, that is, they preach the doctrines which are most familiar and most generally accepted by those to whom they speak. We have already pointed out one reason for this in the peculiar place which the earlier beliefs have in the lives of those who have subsequently abandoned or changed their faith. But in most cases the old faith is the only one with which the converts in revivals are really

familiar at all. In many cases they have never questioned the truth of this doctrine, even though they have not given it effect as the guiding force in their lives. In other cases, the failure positively to assent to the doctrine has been due to carelessness or frivolity and not to any serious logical or philosophical difficulty. In all cases, the fact that it is familiar and is known to have been or to be held by many of the best people with whom the converts are acquainted is a far more effectual ground for accepting it and acting upon it than any logical arguments which the speaker could bring to bear upon them in the few minutes for which he has their attention. The average man has very little skill or capacity for reasoning on religious subjects; and the man who is converted in the revival meeting will ordinarily be below the average in this respect, as he is not the one who has been faithful in attendance on religious exercises and in Bible study, but rather the one who has been quite indifferent to these matters and given his whole attention to supporting or amusing himself. The appeal to such people is through the conscience and the emotions, not through the intellect; and that which is novel to the mind, however true it may be, will only confuse and disturb rather than convince and convict. Thus it comes about that the older doctrines will almost invariably be more effective in arousing morally such masses of people as are converted in missions and revival meetings, and hence they naturally come to be regarded as the saving truths, whatever their actual relation to the truth may be.

Convincing evidence of the seriousness of the difficulty of getting common people to accept unfamiliar doctrine is the experience of missionaries in work among non-Christian peoples. When the work is begun, almost always the preaching will have to continue months or years before the first converts are made, and the higher the stage of culture of the people and the better their religious ideas, the longer and more difficult will the process of conversion be. Thus in China the work of the early missionaries was very slow; and in Mohammedan lands, where the prevailing religion is monotheistic and more like Christianity than any other great form of religion at the present day, there have been, up to the present time, only small numbers of converts.

We spoke of this test of the truth of doctrines by the character of those who hold them, preach them, and are converted by them as a *pseudo-pragmatic* test. This term has been partially justified by the preceding discussion. We have showed that the tendency would be for evangelists to preach more effectively, and for people to be more readily converted, where the familiar doctrines are preached than where the doctrines are in less familiar or newer forms, regardless of the truth of the forms used, whether old or new. The conservative doctrine will be more effective on account of its familiarity. To the extent that this is a correct explanation of its force, it is evident that the effectiveness of the doctrine is no proof whatever of its real truth or value. By this we do not mean that it is conceivable that men might be led to righteous, loving lives by their acceptance of false doctrine. We would insist, rather, that, wherever the faith leads to improvement in the life, it must be because of the truth which was in the faith. But the situations which we have in mind are those of a larger or smaller measure of truth, of more or less reasonable forms of the statement; and our contention is that it is entirely explicable that preaching which presents familiar doctrines and motives should be more effective in reforming and converting men than a preaching of the same truths in forms more reasonable and adequate but less familiar. This we believe to be incontrovertible. The pragmatic test of a doctrine is the effort to determine its value or truth by its effect upon life. But, as has been shown, in the ordinary community it is impossible to put older and newer doctrines or forms of doctrines to comparative tests on the masses of the people, because the psychological conditions under which they would have to be tried are so dissimilar. All the power of conservatism which we are examining and estimating in this essay makes for the greater effectiveness of the older forms of doctrine, and frustrates any attempt at direct comparison of results.

Those whose money maintains and extends religious work are most apt to be conservative, and therefore the propagation of conservative views will be much more strongly aided by the publication of literature, building of churches, commissioning of missionaries, and education of students than the propagation of

newer or more unfamiliar views. The tendency of the possession of property to make a man conservative in general character is well known. As a rule, capital is conservative in politics and in business. Any change of government, of law, of social situation, may imperil trade, depreciate stocks, diminish incomes, make labor more costly or customers scarcer. Especially is this true with men who accumulate their money in legitimate ways. The gambler may remain a gambler, make his fortune one day, risk and lose it the next; but the man who by steady hard work through many years has accumulated a fortune will not lightly risk his money in new enterprises and under new conditions; and he opposes any reduction of the tariff or interference with existing business methods, because any change may unfavorably affect his business or property. Gamblers are not generally good church members, enthusiastic in the propagation of religion; but faithful, steady, hard-working business men very frequently are. The qualities which have made them successful in business are the qualities which make them useful in the church, and which make them view life seriously, religiously.

The conservative temper of their life as a whole is very apt to prevail also in their religious life. Such steady, reliable men, sufficiently interested in religious enterprises to give them their financial support, are ordinarily those who have been connected with the church for a good part of their lives. They became familiar with the prevailing theological doctrines and formulas and accepted them in youth, when their minds were fresh and active, and have had no time or occasion for such study or thought as would lead to a revision of their beliefs in later years. They go to church to worship, to be encouraged, comforted, or put to sleep, not to be instructed in Christian doctrine, least of all in doctrines different from those they have learned to regard as the final truth, supernaturally revealed by God. They have more confidence in older preachers, with seasoned judgment, than in the younger ones, with their new-fashioned, and perhaps foolish, notions. If they assume the part of dogmatists, they are frequently certain of their own infallibility in proportion as they are ignorant of other views and the grounds for them, and are more conservative than the conservative preachers who have

instructed them. The more earnestly they believe the doctrines they hold, the more conscientiously will they support those ministers, churches, missionaries, and schools which teach and maintain what they believe to be the truth.

Fortunately most church-members have learned to trust experts, and are willing to leave the examination into the theological beliefs of candidates for the ministry and theological professors to those who have made a study of theology. But the popular support of Bible Schools, where earnest young people without adequate education are drilled for a few months or years in the conservative forms of doctrines derived from the Bible in traditional ways, and then sent out to convert the heathen or feed the flocks of Christendom, is a demonstration of the appeal which conservative religious forms make to conservative men of business. The circulation, at the expense of two Christian laymen, of booklets in defence of such conservative forms and formulas among two hundred and fifty thousand Christian teachers and leaders is an illustration of this fact. A Bible School which the writer recently visited in Great Britain, where, at the expense of such conservative laymen, splendid provision had been made for dormitories, lecture-rooms, and the physical needs of the students in general, but none for modern theological books or periodicals in the library, is another example. The transference by such conservative men of their membership and financial support from churches where the preaching is out of harmony with their views to others in the community where it better accords with them is a common and effective expression of the earnestness of their faith and their conservatism in form and feeling.

It is said that when the financial agent of one of the Western colleges in the United States was planning to collect money in the East for the college, he was advised by one who was familiar with conditions not to waste his time on the liberal churches. That meant, if the adviser was correct, that in those churches which, in comparison with others in the community, had the reputation of being liberal, either the men of means would be absent or they would not be so ready to give their money for denominational education. The reason for this has already been explained, but it will perhaps appear more clearly, and the significance of the

reputation of the church in this connection will be seen, as we go on to the second part of this study.

Doctrinal standards fixed by the law of the state or recognized by it, ecclesiastical organizations, and institutions of every sort have great stability. The importance of a definition of sound doctrine has always and rightly been recognized, although the reason of its importance has very generally been misunderstood. All organized associations for common worship have felt the need of an explicit formulation of their faith. Once stated, members are received into the church or the denomination, and particularly into its ministry, with implicit or explicit assent to these confessions or, as they soon become, rules of faith, or symbols. It is generally assumed that only those who assent to these creeds will unite themselves with the church; and it is held that men who, after being admitted into the ministry or priesthood, change their views for such as were not in harmony with the symbols should resign their ministry voluntarily, or be removed from it by ecclesiastical authority. When once such tests have been adopted, it is almost inevitable that a considerable proportion of the membership and the clergy of the denomination will adhere strictly to the creeds in their original letter, and, in intention at least, in their original meaning; and any within the body who desire to have them set aside or revised are regarded by them as recreants who ought in honesty to withdraw from the church, and are sometimes stigmatized as heretics and false teachers, if not as hypocrites.

In cases where a religious body, by a large majority, has modified its creed, it has repeatedly been held by the courts that the minority which adhered to the original creed was legally the church, and as such entitled to hold the property, of which the majority is thus deprived. The civil courts are more strictly bound to the letter and original intent of a document than the ecclesiastical leaders, who might feel morally justified in letting the outgrown letter fall into desuetude or even in setting it aside, if they believed themselves in so doing to be faithful to its spirit. It is clear that where the church is under state control there is still greater difficulty in changing its doctrinal basis, as the general public has no particular interest in making such a change, and

those who desire a change would under ordinary circumstances always have the weight of prejudice against them. "If they did not like the creed, why did they enter the church; if they do not like it, why do they remain?"

Theological schools have often been bound by their charters to teach certain doctrines, and to engage only such instructors as shall hold and defend those doctrines. The fastening of prescribed forms of doctrine upon self-perpetuating institutions possessing endowments which are in the eye of the law charitable trusts, and as such under the cognizance and protection of the courts, thus obstructs progress, and puts under suspicion any one who proposes change, thereby depriving him of his influence in the institution with which he is connected, even if it does not make him immediately liable to removal or to an ecclesiastical penalty.

Finally, the liturgical and sacramental forms of a church are conserved with great tenacity, and perpetuate the doctrines which they embody or with which they are associated. The Scriptures read, the prayers repeated, the songs sung, and the creeds recited, all have doctrinal implications and correspondences; and the richer and more venerable the liturgy is, the more serious would be any attempt to alter it in consistency with a change in the doctrinal point of view, and the more strongly those to whom it is familiar and dear would resist any such proposal. Being associated with the worship of God, the source of truth, the forms of worship are felt to partake of his sanctity and veracity, and hence to be rightly immutable.

II. THE REJECTION OF THE NEW AS SUCH

Men frequently ignore the newer doctrines and decline to consider them at all, because they are prejudiced against them or their defenders by those who, professing knowledge of the matter, condemn them. So much is spoken and written about these subjects that no one has time to consider or competence to judge it all, and every one has to rely to a large extent on the judgment of others. But such judgments are not always either intelligent or impartial. It is often enough to condemn a teaching that it

disagrees with some familiar conceptions. Sometimes a man's views will not be considered because of the denomination or school or persons with which he is associated. In other instances prejudice is aroused against the opinions of a writer because of some eccentricities in his character. Anything, in fact, which can be said against a man from any point of view may be sufficient to prevent his ideas from receiving attention from those who would otherwise consider and perhaps accept them. Thus, an orthodox congregation often refuses to consider a candidate who has been educated at a school which is tainted with heterodoxy; conservative men take care to send their sons to schools which have the reputation of being "sound," and choose the church, the periodicals, and the books which are esteemed orthodox.

A social penalty, sometimes almost an interdict, may be imposed upon religious views of certain sorts and those who propagate or accept them. A man's connection with one church or another may seriously affect his success in business, and in most cases the body holding the more conservative views offers an advantage. Since it is well understood that men are strongly influenced by their teachers and by the opinions of those about them, it is not strange that those who believe the new doctrines to be false and harmful should be unwilling to expose themselves or their friends to them at all, lest they be tainted or led astray. There is thus a large probability that any new doctrine will not receive fair consideration from the average man. It is true that among young people, if the new is given consideration at all, it is likely to be overvalued and have undue influence, from the same undeveloped judgment that we have been referring to, and that this to some extent counterbalances the conservative prejudice against the new. But it remains true that any new view, good or bad, has the weight of popular prejudice against it, and is sure not to receive impartial consideration from the mass of men so long as it is new to them.

People of well-balanced and sober judgment are likely to be repelled by the temperament and character of those who defend and those who readily accept opinions while they are new or because they are new, and to reject the opinion out of distaste for their adherents. As the reaction of thought and life upon

each other in any given social condition tends to adapt each to the other, and thus to relate and harmonize thought and action in their various normal forms, so any new form of thought is likely to be out of harmony with the whole social condition in which it appears, and to cause friction and abnormal action in various ways. This may be illustrated by considering various classes of people who are predisposed to accept the new, and their relations to harmonious and normal social conditions.

Thoughtless and frivolous people are apt to be attracted by the new and to accept it solely because of its novelty. We cannot imagine that there was any considerable depth of character in the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there, who "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." Those who are only interested in the new are those who have no serious occupation or view of life. There is a class of people who desire to be entertained by novel things, whether in the material or the mental world; and they cannot but be repellent to those who are earnestly trying to do their duty and make the world better. Such adherents are therefore more of a hindrance than a help to any cause which they take up; and it is a matter of observation that they are most attracted by those teachers, those churches and that literature which have a reputation for novelty, or heresy, or liberalism. If a preacher of the newer views avoids the name of innovation, he will hardly draw hearers of this class, however new and radical his views may really be; and, on the other hand, the man who advertises his radicalism will have a train of novelty seekers, though at bottom his teaching may be innocuous and even commonplace. This helps to explain the weakness of churches having the name of being liberal; for the kind of people we have been describing will not sacrifice money or time or strength to assist in propagating the faith which they assume so easily and hold so lightly.

Erratic people are prone to accept new doctrines because they seem to promise the satisfaction of some need they have felt, which the older churches and the more familiar doctrines have not met. Individuals who for any reason have developed abnormally and entertain peculiar notions or aspirations are likely to be discontented with churches and systems of doctrine

which do not emphasize those ideas or desires as they do. Thus ill-balanced persons of all sorts are likely to leave conservative surroundings and to consort with circles in which new ideas are welcome, and especially where satisfaction seems to be offered to their individual bent. The mystic will be attracted by Theosophy; the sick, by Christian Science; those who have an appetite for the supernatural, by claims of a special revelation from God and the power to work miracles; the seeker for industrial and social reform, by the church which gives special attention to that subject; and thus those who, in comparison with the average man, are excessively interested in any phase of thought will be drawn to each new teaching which promises satisfaction for the particular need felt, or is thought possibly to afford it. But of course the ordinary man feels uncomfortable in the society of extremists of any sort, and is likely to avoid that which pleases them just for that reason.

Self-seeking people are often attracted by the new because it seems to offer them opportunity for gain, or honor, or other advantage not attainable in conservative organizations, or because the new doctrine seems to license some desired course of action condemned by the old. Men whose ambitions for office or preferment are disappointed in a certain church, or who feel themselves slighted or aggrieved in some way, often for that reason go off and form a new organization, or join a different denomination, or at least another church from that in which they have been. It frequently happens, also, that people who have been in congregations where certain methods of business or forms of pleasure are frowned upon leave such congregations and go to others which put less narrow restrictions on their desires or habits. This change may take them from one church to another in which the form of doctrine is at least as old and familiar as in that which they have left; but it also carries others over into newer organizations or more liberal churches, to which they sometimes contribute an element not wholly desirable. A similar result comes about in a somewhat different way. Morality and religion are closely bound together, particularly in the consciousness of religious persons. Thus people who in a certain denomination are taught that card-playing, dancing, theatre-going, and the like are wrong,

will regard such moral standards as inseparable from the religious teachings which are their counterpart. If, then, they are led to accept newer views of religious truth, and thus to reject, at least partially, those which they had before held, they will easily feel themselves emancipated also from the rules of conduct that were associated with the older views. Sometimes other principles of conduct are taught in connection with the new doctrine, and sometimes not; but the release from the older rules may be felt as much in the one case as in the other. Thus the conservative in thought and action, seeing the liberal doing things which he (perhaps rightly, perhaps mistakenly—it is immaterial to the psychological situation) regards as sinful, is inclined to condemn the newer doctrine as naturally and necessarily leading to loose living, and its teachers and adherents as immoral. On the other hand, the newer doctrine may be rejected because it is seen that it would require better and more unselfish living, greater self-sacrifice and labor, than that which is more familiar.

The newer doctrines are likely to be accepted by the young and immature, who, without an adequate appreciation of the truth and value of the old, are more impressed by the contrasts between the old and the new than by their agreements, and go to extremes in their zeal for the one and their repudiation of the other. Without doubt, the rejection of newer forms of doctrine by conservatives is often entirely rational: they know well the value of their beliefs and the foundations on which they rest, and find this value unrecognized and the reasonable arguments which support their views ignored by those who represent the new view. The preceding discussion will have made it clear why young people much more readily accept new views than older people. But from the limitations of their knowledge, experience, and judgment which belong to their age, they cannot be expected to have the broader outlook which perceives the truth in the forms of thought which they reject as well as in that which they accept both in form and substance. They are, therefore, very likely to be impatient with the old fogies who refuse to see the new light, and in an unreasonable spirit to condemn the older views, of which their own are in reality always largely the product, often agreeing in principle though differing in details and

form of statement. Such young people, then, to a certain extent misrepresenting the newer conceptions, just as they fail of sympathetic understanding of the older, arouse in more mature minds both reasonable objections to their views and prejudice against them, and alienate some who might otherwise be more hospitable to the new doctrine.

III. PRACTICAL DEDUCTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In the search for truth, the student should not be misled by the pseudo-pragmatic appraisal of the conservative doctrine, as such, but patiently test the doctrine itself. This principle has been explained above, and need here only be summarized. The pragmatic test of any theory is the value which it has, or would have, in practice, when properly applied. But no doctrine held doubtfully can compare in working efficiency with one held with unquestioning assurance; no doctrine held by an individual of general eccentric habit of mind can be compared in value with another doctrine held by a man of normal character; and, in general, no doctrine with the power of conservatism behind it can be properly compared in effect upon a community or an individual with a doctrine which is not supported by this power. In measuring the value of a doctrine by its effect upon life, great allowance must therefore be made for the psychological condition of those upon whom its effect is to be noted. In certain classes, as we have seen, there is a presumption in favor of the new rather than the old, which must be also allowed for; but among the maturer, wiser, and more stable part of the community, the psychological influence of the conservative form will be far superior to that of the newer, as such. In comparing older with newer forms of doctrine, then, where they really differ, the student will be obliged to fall back upon the judgment of his own mind as to which is the more reasonable and the more applicable to the problems of life, and on the feeling of his own heart as to which is the higher and nobler conception of God and life, and which would the more effectively prompt himself and other men to the most helpful and altruistic action.

There is great possibility of mischief in the labors of the honest

liberal who does not understand the right attitude toward older forms of doctrine and toward conservative people, nor know how to establish the new without losing the value of the old. It is not to be denied that there is a great deal of truth in the old doctrines in the historic forms in which they are held by the mass of Christian people today, and that this historic faith has shown itself in noble and self-sacrificing life. It is a very much easier thing to unsettle faith in good religious doctrine than to implant effective religious faith in one who does not possess it. Superficial ideas of the newer forms of religious faith have been spread far and wide by their friends as well as their enemies; and while their adversaries would be most certain to emphasize the differences rather than the agreements of the old and the new, the same mistake has often been made also by the supporters of the new.

In either case the tendency is to shake the faith of many in the older doctrines without giving them sufficient reason earnestly to accept and vitalize the new. A journalist, writing from the conservative standpoint of the harm done by liberal preaching, truly says: "The strength of all churches is in believing, not in doubting and denying—'This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith.' And a man does not need to be an expert, a scholar, or a theologian, to see when the effect of a preacher's discourses is to weaken faith and to fill the minds of his hearers with doubt." Where a minister believes the newer view to be the truer, he may well give care that the instruction of the children, so far as he can influence it, is in the better form. For the older members of his church, his best method will be the preaching of the truth contained in both the older and the newer forms of doctrine, with such care and sympathy that he may lead his hearers to see that the truth they have long believed is not to be questioned, but to be made even more firm and effective by some changes in the form in which it is held. Thus, if a man actually has a new view of truth which is more adequate and of greater worth than the older views—and here, again, we must beware of thinking that the new is true merely because it is new—he will be able to present it far more effectively, wherever conservative forces are active, by maintaining the most sympathetic

attitude toward the older beliefs than by impatience or intolerance of them. How difficult it is to do this, those know best who have tried to argue with firmly settled conservatives in whose minds there was little or no hope of any change. But that it is worth while, and required by faithfulness to God and man, cannot be doubted. The meaning of the term "conservative" is equivalent to "preservative," and for any intelligent conservative it signifies not the preservation of the old because it is old, but because it is good. The wise liberal must be as anxious to preserve all that is good in the old as the most zealous conservative.

A very serious temptation to insincerity comes to the liberal who realizes the power of conservatism. Knowing that in certain situations the reputation of being liberal, or loose, in his doctrine will prevent him from getting desired positions, or from winning the adherence of certain people, or, in general, militate against his usefulness or success, there is danger that he will endeavor to create the impression that he believes what he does not believe, that he accepts the old formulas and creeds in a degree which he really does not do. Cases are not unknown in which religious teachers have spoken or written in terms unequivocally indicating adherence to forms of doctrine to which they could not honestly assent. We need not here discuss whether such equivocation could in any circumstances be justified. The man with new and unfamiliar views of truth cannot hope to be completely and correctly understood in any expressions which he may use. Should he use more unusual and radical expressions, he may be successful in showing his hearers that he disagrees with them; but generally not nearly so successful in helping them to understand what he actually does believe and desires to teach them as if he used more familiar phraseology, which some will interpret more conservatively than he means it. He cannot be held responsible for all the ways in which his words may be misunderstood, even though he may be able to some extent to foresee such misunderstanding.

He is responsible, however, for false impressions of his own belief which he intended his words to convey. If, for example, he preaches on the atonement, and begins by pointing out how wrong the prevailing ideas of the atonement are, he is likely to alienate

the support and interest of those who have held them, and perhaps do more harm than good. If he expresses himself in such a way as naturally to convey the impression that he accepts the prevailing view in all respects, when that is far from being the case, he is a liar or a hypocrite. If he preaches so as to emphasize the truth in the familiar views, stating positively the changes which he believes necessary to the understanding of the truth, but without specifically calling attention to the fact that these views are new or different from the familiar ones, his work will probably be most helpful, and above reproach, where a part at least of his congregation is conservative.

We must frankly face the very serious situation which exists in most of the larger historic branches of the Christian church; namely, that creeds made centuries ago are still prescribed as tests for entrance to the ministry, and are, therefore, professed or subscribed to by hundreds of men who do not, in their true minds and hearts, assent to them in their original meaning or the modern popular interpretation of them. Without discussing here the morality of seeking ordination under such circumstances, which must be a matter for the careful consideration of candidates for the sacred office, we may urge upon the churches the necessity of doing away with the conditions which put its ministry in such a position. How this can be done does not fall within the scope of this article; but the changes which, as every intelligent man must recognize, are taking place in religious beliefs make it imperative that some way be found by which men who are compelled by all that is worthy, mentally and morally, in them, to accept some changes in view, may enter upon the service of their churches or continue in it without compromising their conscience.

The example of Jesus is instructive to his followers. He was in some ways much too conservative, and in others much too radical, for the people of his time; but he was always sympathetic to all that was good in the old and familiar beliefs and customs, and very judicious in his efforts to reform them. He did not fulfil the hopes of John the Baptist as a stern judge of sin and evil, nor the hopes of those who desired a Messiah that should free the people from Roman domination; but he did not roughly

and inconsiderately denounce these hopes. On the other hand, he taught a spiritual Messiahship and a spiritual and moral Kingdom of God which were so at variance with the popular hopes and expectations that even his most intimate and loyal disciples could only slowly apprehend and assimilate them. He announced, therefore, that he was come not to destroy, but to fulfil, the Law and the Prophets; and he put his new and revolutionary teachings in the form of parables, which would in time be understood by the more thoughtful and spiritual, but would not, by the novelty of their truth, instantly repel those who were less advanced. This sympathetic method arose from no selfish desire for power or popularity; for he took no step to avoid the death which came to him as a result of his righteous life and the novelty and unpopularity of his teaching. He was fearless, but not reckless, in his teaching of truth, connecting himself and his teaching with the great truths of the Scriptures, while correcting and transcending them and the current interpretation of them as the teaching of the highest truth required.